

Storyville is Ours

"You did what you did because it gave you pleasure," Lestat purred. A belt that he was aware of only in its absence loosened around his ribs, allowing something warm and fizzy to bubble up inside him. In the drought-stricken landscape of a vampire's body, such an intense physical sensation was almost dizzying. He clasped Louis' hand and stroked his chin, eyes already dipping to lips that he planned to be kissing before the night was out. Hopefully *long* before. "Companion of the Dark Gift, finally. We should make this our anniversary."

The plume collapsed instantly as Louis pulled away and retreated to the window. "Anniversary?! That out there, that's on *me*."

"No. You merely provided them the excuse." Lestat's joy has ebbed now, making the familiar frustration left behind that much more irritating. As a racial epithet reached their vampiric ears, he watched the other man's spine go rigid, bringing him to the fullness of his considerable height. He watched those slim shoulders square. With his lips already pursed to mouth more words of reassurance about the endless perfidy of mortals, Louis cut him off with, "Oh, I ain't done yet. How would you like to tear out a few throats tonight?"

Lestat's damned husk of a heart leapt like it hadn't in years. "What do you have in mind?" The purr had returned.

"You, me, together." A finger stabbed in the general direction of the ruckus outside. "We can stop them."

"You want to quell a riot." He should have known.

"Why not?"

Even as the protest leaves his mouth, Lestat knows he's going to acquiesce. "There tend to be quite a few witnesses milling about riots." There it was: the beginnings of a rationalization condensing in his brain like droplets on a julep glass. Why does he even bother fighting?

"Then we'll strike from the shadows, just like you taught me. We could tear those bastards apart *so easy*." Louis leaned in to deliver the coup de grace, a look simultaneously fierce and pleading. "And it would only take you a few seconds to get me there."

"What do you mean?"

"You know exactly what I mean."

Well, this was a surprise. Deciding whether it was a pleasant one could wait. "You remember that."

"Of course. But if you don't want to come with me..."

And the rationalization was now fully formed, crushing the last of his resistance. He didn't get to **see** Louis' slaughter of Alderman Fenwick. Here was a second chance.

Two flesh and blood gargoyles perched on the roof of the Azalea, the tallest building in Storyville. They barely had time to survey the carnage before Louis fixed on the cluster of men throwing Molotov cocktails through the windows of his saloon. A growl escaped his throat as he leaned over, looking for a way down.

Lestat swooped and flew two men from the rear of the group up to the roof, offering one to Louis. There was no more delicate sipping. He watched in fascination as Louis latched onto the arsonist's throat like a starving tick, practically swelling as he gorged himself. Abruptly, his companion tore himself away. His eyes squeezed shut as if it caused him pain, but he gasped, "We have to save the building," and cut his meal short with a talon across the jugular. The spell was broken.

With a long-suffering sigh, Lestat finished off his own snack in the same way and snatched up the remaining arsonists, two collars in each hand this time. It took under a second to rocket them up to a height from which he could drop them to their shrieking deaths on the concrete below, yet by the time he touched down, a vague blur on the other side of the roof was already turning back into Louis. The other man punched through the siding of the Azalea's water tank, sending a tidal wave that nearly swept him away with it crashing over the shingles. Lestat managed to rip back a roofing section in time to channel it downward. Once satisfied that the water was funneling down the stairs and to the fire, Louis clambered down to balcony and then patio to beat out the remaining flames.

While his back was turned, an even larger group- eight men and two women- noticed his proximity to crumpled Caucasian corpses. One pointed and opened his mouth to sound the alarm; another leveled a rifle. They never got any farther. In eerie silence, they turned and

marched as one into the nearest inferno. Lestat just as silently floated down, his fury evaporating the instant it met the awe on Louis' face.

The vampires rapidly worked their way down Liberty Street, leaping from rooftops, darting out to drag rioters back into the shadows with inhuman speed, compelling some to turn on others or take their own lives when killing them without being seen was impossible. They picked them off in ones and twos and even threes. They put out what fires they could and used the rest for body disposal.

A ripple of unease travelled down the street, as if the perpetrators had begun to sense that something had gone terribly, horribly wrong with their evening of murder and merriment. Cocky shouts turned strained. The milling became more frantic. Lestat stopped in the middle of the street to watch his partner with something approaching a violent wonder. Maybe it was the gallons of fresh human blood plumping his veins or maybe it was just his sheer hatred of his victims, but he'd never seen Louis kill like this before. Not once. The savagery of the way he pounced on human beings, separating bone from sinew, brutally cutting short their screams as he cleansed back alleys with their blood, left him more than a little breathless. For a moment, he even forgot that it was all in the name of aiding *humanity*. If this was what it took... Yes, if this was what it took to see **that**, he-

Lestat was bowled over by a fleeing resident. The man didn't even stop to mutter one of the timid apologies he had been hearing all night, his whiteness presumed to mark him as one of the pillagers. As he dusted himself off, he realized Louis still had not emerged from a burning building. Only extended contact would kill him, but the thought of him getting burned just to save some human was distressing.

As he considered going in himself, a small, whistling noise of relief escaped his lips. Louis dropped from a second story window with a small figure in his arms and sent a mental message for Lestat to join him behind the building.

The girl he laid on the cobblestones was perhaps thirteen or fourteen, and unlike the ones Louis had carried from burning buildings before her, badly charred. She was too damaged even to scream anymore, emitting only tortured whimpers. The sound stirred even his sympathy. Her angel of dubious salvation, on the other hand, had burns on his arms and legs that he seemed oblivious to. Lestat's heart sank as he realized that fierce, pleading look was back.

Louis grabbed onto his gaze and held it. "You can save her. I know you can."

"I hope you're not suggesting what I think you're suggesting." He put extra roundness on the "g"s for emphasis.

"Please."

Lestat stared down at the helplessly twitching figure. Her eyes were rolling up behind fluttering lids. "You can't save everybody, Louis. She's cooked, so eat her." For Louis' benefit, he added, "Put her out of her misery."

"But I can save *this* one. Or you can. Please, I'm begging you." Louis scratched the hem of his pants in agitation as he bobbed slightly. His other hand rested on Lestat's shoulder in a gesture that didn't fool him for a second. Not to mention, it was caked in cooled, sticky, spoiling gore.

"So she can be what? A lapdog?"

"No, not a dog." Louis' eyes lit up. "A daughter."

"A daughter. Us?" Why does he even bother? Already, images of the three of them gathered around the baby grand were poking holes through his walls; images in which the girl was perched preocociously atop it while his lately-distant partner sat at his side on the bench. They were all smiling. Lestat made one more effort to exert his will. "Her thirst will be indiscriminate when she wakes up."

"Then we make sure she's pointed in the right directions."

Lestat rested his hand over Louis' for the briefest of moments, thumb tracing gentle circles over the skin between thumb and forefinger, then pushed past him. His sleeves were already rolled up to spare them the crimson dripping from his hands and forearms.

Moments later, a teen girl appeared in the mouth of the alleyway. She grinned at a group fanning the flames outside the general store with an impudence guaranteed to boil their already inflamed blood and let them chase her back into the blackness. A trio of vampires pounced.

Claudia looked up from a stopped pulse, unaware of the blood dribbling messily down her chin, and demanded, "More!"

Lestat wiped up the spill to make her presentable and said, "Plenty more is to be had, ma petite. But you must do as we say." He flashed up to the roof to scout the next leg of their onslaught.

Claudia stared pie-eyed. "HOW'D HE DO THAT?!"

"You'll learn to do it someday. In the meantime, you can already move faster than you ever thought was possible... if you try. Think of it as a family trait."

"We're a family?"

From on high, Lestat saw Louis smile.

The next morning, as three exhausted but amply bloated vampires took their hard-earned rest in two hidden coffins, the surviving sixteen aldermen of New Orleans awoke to broken door locks and something even more alarming in their studies. Written in blood on the walls of these private sanctums, tastefully shielded from the eyes of wives and children, were three words of warning: Storyville Is Ours.